

[Moses Ariel]

2 Typed/12/11/38 [From F. A. Donovan Thomaston?]

Moses Ariel

Grand Street

Yankee

Employed for 40 years by Seth Thomas Clock Co. retired 8 years ago ("Well young man I don't know that I can help you much. I think perhaps some of the old German clockmakers would be better informed. I worked in the tool room and when I first went to work here they were making the watches. ("I enjoyed the work, and I wouldn't have swapped it for the best watch-making job in the plant. I worked on tools for the watch work and it was highly interesting. They gave us all the time we wanted to do it and all they asked was that the final job be a good one.

"And it was., usually. You had to be an inventor of sorts and you had to have a little native ingenuity. We didn't have any figures or blueprints to go by.

"They used to come and explain what was needed and tell us to go to work on it and take our time, but to do the job right. That was typical of the whole plant in those days. There wasn't any of this constant push, push push! for production. Most everybody was on day work, at a comfortable rate of pay, and the idea was to make good clocks.

"No matter what the operation, as a rule, a man took considerable pride in doing his work and he wouldn't let it leave his hands until it was done to the best of his ability. The bosses were aware of this attitude and encouraged it and that's the way Seth Thomas clocks got a world-wide reputation for precision and durability.

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"I've got two of the reliable models right here in the house and they've both been running for I don't know how many years. They'll be ticking away, I presume likely, long after I've stopped ticking myself."

(Mr. Ariel arose to call my attention to an old fashioned, square-faced, pendulum clock, the dial discolored with age. He opened the lower 2 door of the case to disclose a pasted, tattered label bearing the legend "Seth Thomas Clocks, Plymouth Hollow, U.S A. Warranted Good.")

"You can see the date on there if you look real close. It's 1852. And this town, as you can see, wasn't Thomaston then, it was Plymouth Hollow. That clock was given to me by Mrs. Newell Webster, who was a niece of Aaron Thomas.

"Yessir, they made clocks when they made that model. I guess it was just about that time, or maybe 10 years or so later, that they began to import the German clockmakers, and though you'll find some to disagree with you, to my mind they were the best the industry ever saw.

"In Germany clockmaking was a real trade, almost you might say, a profession. Before they could call themselves clockmakers, they had to be able to assemble a clock from the mainspring out. They spent specified periods of time on each operation and by the time they were through they knew the business.

"Of course the old Yankee clockmakers were good, there's no denying that, but they were specialists, you might say. That is, they learned one particular operation and sometimes spent a lifetime at it. Of course there were many who could put a clock together too, and make it go, but I wouldn't class 'em with the Germans.

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"These new Dutchmen that have been coming over here since the war aren't so good, I understand, but then the whole place seems to have slipped badly in recent years. I think it's a case of too much piecework.

"I remember the last few years I worked there, they'd got to speeding things up. I used to watch them drilling plates for instance. They'd never bother to get 'em level first, and as a result the whole train of the clock would be off. The holes wouldn't be in the right places, the pinions would be out of line and they'd [stick?]. What happened then? Why the pinion 'd stick and half the movements would be stoppers. 3 ("Well they've let most of the old clockmakers go and I think they've made a mistake. And what's more I told Mason T. Adams so one time he came up here to see me." (The late Mason T. Adams was vice president and general manager of Seth Thomas Clock Co. before the merger with General Times Instruments. The consolidation took place shortly after his death.) ("I told him, I said, 'Mr.Adams I should think these men would still be of value to the company. Even if they're slowing up as workers, doesn't their experience count for anything? They ought to prove good teachers at any rate.'" ("And he said: 'I'm inclined to agree with you and if I had my way, maybe something might be done about it. But you know I'm not the whole works down there.'" (My grandson works for them now, and every once in a while I hear him stewing. That office force they have now, the way I hear, they've got one man in the office for every bench worker in the shop. They've got prices so low, I'm told, a man can't no more'n take the work out of one box and throw it into another to make his day rate, let alone put in the proper time on it. ("I heard the young fellow tell about a lad he knows, wheel truer, working under those conditions. He said the lad didn't make any attempt to get the work done right. Just spun the wheels a couple of times and threw 'em into a box, said he knew they'd wobble but what the hell did he care,the work was coming so bad it was all he could do to make his day rate. ("You talk about clockmaker's profanity young fella, and if there's any special brand it ought to be ripe about now. I'd suggest that you talk to some of the young fellows down there."